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In Break With 92-Year Tradition, Congress Will Kick Off Budget Process

by [Niraj Chokshi](#)

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This year's presidential budget proposal may be more than 60 days late. (Chet Susslin)

It's budget week on Capitol Hill--the start of an annual ritual, but one that this year bucks a nearly century-old tradition.

Over the next few days, Senate Democrats and House Republicans will unveil [starkly different](#) proposals for how to fund the government in the next fiscal year. It will be the first time since 2009 that the Senate majority party has released a budget proposal. The dueling congressional proposals will come as President Obama still has not yet set a date for the release of his budget blueprint. This year, in fact, will mark the first time that the Congress--and not the president--will kick off the budget process.

The modern executive budget process, requiring an annual White House budget submission to Congress, was established under the Budget and Accounting Act of 1921. The law also created the agency that would eventually become the White House Office of Management and Budget. And, every year since then, according to [the Library of Congress](#) and *The New York Times*, the president's submission has represented the start of the budget process--until now.

The tradition was broken after the White House missed the early February deadline for sending the president's proposed budget to Congress. Missing that deadline is not unusual: Obama has done it [three years](#) running. And Presidents Reagan, Clinton, George W. Bush, and Obama were each late in submitting a budget in their first year in office, according to [the Congressional Research Service](#). But letting Congress start the budget process has never happened in modern times.

The modern submission deadline was set in 1990 as some time between the first Mondays of January and February. Since then, the only other president besides Obama to submit a delayed budget after his first year in office was Clinton, according to [a House Republican table](#) that charted budget submissions back to 1923.

White House spokesman Josh Earnest on Friday blamed the delay on the nation's recent fiscal drama.

“We had a fiscal-cliff debate that lasted through the end of last year,” he said, referring to the end-of-year fight over expiring tax cuts and impending spending cuts, known as the sequester.

“Certainly, the [March 1] implementation of the sequester has affected the ability of the administration to put together our budget proposal. But that's something that people are hard at work on, and I think in the coming weeks we'll have some more details about the budget.”

Long delays aren't totally unheard of, either. Reagan [blamed](#) a deficit-reduction deal that had been negotiated late in 1987 for a 45-day delay in his budget in 1988. Although the White House hasn't said when it will release the budget for the next fiscal year, [some reports](#) said the administration is looking at delivering it on April 8. If that's the case, it will have been more than 60 days past the deadline.